

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	School of Modern Languages and Cultures
Subject(s):	Spanish
Programme(s) / Module(s):	SPPO1010, SPPO1090, SPPO1091, SPPO1092, SPPO2010, SPPO2011, SPPO2580, SPPO2581, SPPO3010, SPPO3062, SPPO3420, SPPO3640
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA(Hons) Spanish BA(Hons) Spanish, Portuguese & Latin American Studies

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**Completed report**

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk.

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Quality Assurance**
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards**Matters for Urgent Attention**

If there are any areas which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box

N/A

Only applicable in first year of appointment

Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?

N/A

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

Please comment on your experience of the programme(s) over the period of your appointment, remarking in particular on changes from year to year and the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and the procedures of the School

N/A

Standards

1. **Please indicate the extent to which the programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award**
- *The appropriateness of the Intended Learning Outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
 - *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

Please see report from 2012/13.

2. **Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?**
- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

Yes, they did. Please see report from 2012/13.

3. **Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs**
- *The design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards;*
 - *The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.*

Please see report from 2012/13. Assessment methods are varied and appropriate, however, the following are some areas that deserve a bit of attention:

Module descriptions could highlight more the formative elements of assessment. Currently there does not seem to be a full indication of the assessment strategy but only a reference to summative assessment (the documentation calls it formal assessment), that is, assessment that carries weight. I have discovered by talking to colleagues that some modules do have indeed interesting formative methods of assessing student progress. It will be good if those methods could be captured as well in the module descriptions.

The School should consider the adoption of the extended scale 0-100 which will give a more straightforward tool for calculating results (see to this respect my comments in 2010/11). The full range of marks should also be used to reflect student performance.

When possible, the programme should aim at having assignments marked by computers. This possibility is evident for those language modules where some assessment tasks are based on multiple-choice questions. Tools for computer-marked assignments are available in Blackboard, and externally free of charge. Research has indicated the many benefits of using this means of assessment.

In relation to the above, the programme should consider the development of a policy on e-assessment submission, feedback and marking. At the moment students are still required to hand in paper copies of their work, even of work that is more suitable for online handling. It is not helpful for students or lecturers to have to deal with two formats. Institutions are now moving rapidly to electronic management of assessment. More information on this issue could be found at:

A good read is the recent report *Supporting assessment and feedback practice with technology* (October 2013), available at:

4. **Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs?**
- *The academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;*
 - *The strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort.*

Yes. Please see report from 2012/13.

5. **For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum**

N/A

6. **Please comment on the nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year**

It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.

Year after year there is evidence of fine tuning and innovation in some elements of the modules.

This year a clear indication of these improvements have been the following:

- A stronger emphasis on students' pronunciation with the introduction to a series of activities focused on sounds and linking vowels.
- Tasks focusing on employability such as producing a CV, writing an application for a job and preparing for an interview.
- Translation tasks are being transformed as well with activities such as transcribing and subtitling which again are directly connected with the development of practical employability skills.
- Also it is pertinent to mention here the effectiveness and relevance for students' research skills and digital skills of the second run of the SPPO3640 module where they produce their own podcasts informed by research.

7. Please comment on the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching

This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.

There many examples of how the Spanish curriculum is evolving according to current research in the area of languages as well as more generally in educational research, including the idea of transforming undergraduate students' as researchers, and the introduction of real task-based activities.

Further improvements in forthcoming years could focus, for instance, on intonation for expressive language production, further integration of research and digital skills. I would also suggest that adjustments are not done independently at module level but that there is an outcomes-based approach to the qualification where there is a clear coherence in the learning and assessment experience.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

N/A

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

N/A.

The Examination/Assessment Process

10. The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner.

Whether External Examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.

I did receive the External Examiners handbook which I found very useful.

However there seems to be a lack of administrative support in terms of making available programme and module documentation, access to the VLE and setting the work for the externals prior the Board of Examiners. For instance, copies of the exams papers and criteria are occasionally missing which makes difficult to have a view on the assessment process. Minutes of previous Boards are not sent beforehand. See also below (point 11). I have not received responses to each of my annual reports, which suggests that the process for recording and sending the responses is unclear.

It would be extremely useful, and practical, if externals could have access to all the draft assessment papers and scripts via the VLE. Currently, I receive exams via email which is not a secure and confidential way to exchange them nor is it convenient for my inbox as the files are usually large.

11. Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks, marking criteria?

The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.

I did not receive this systematically for each module. The School could make sure that all this information is provided at the beginning of each academic year.

12. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

Yes to both questions. I had a chance to see all the draft examination papers and any feedback I provided was considered and implemented as appropriate.

13. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes to both questions.

14. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

N/A

15. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

The academic team could do with some administrative support for all those aspects mentioned above (point 10).

16. Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?

Please see report from 2012/13.

Other comments

Please use this box if you wish to make any further comments not covered elsewhere on the form

At the Board of Examiners there was a discussion about how to deal with mixed language levels and how best place students at the right one. There were also comments about unfair advantage for those with prior knowledge of the language. Lecturers have noticed that some students could be more adequately challenged at a higher level. This same issue was discussed with respect to the students registered at the Language Centre's Board of Examiners where the team expressed the possibility of requesting students to sit a placement test before or during the first few weeks of study. This is an issue in other universities, and as far as I know, there is no simple answer to this situation. It is my view that lectures should continue guiding and advising students whenever they perceive students are not in the right language module. If the programme is keen to introduce some form of placement test, for Spanish self-testing there are some websites with this purpose in mind, for instance:

School of Modern Languages and Cultures
Spanish, Portuguese and
Latin American Studies



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

05 May 2015

Dear

Now that all External Examiners' reports have been received, I would like to respond to both the general comments from all Externals and the specific recommendations which you made in the reports in relation to the academic session 2013/2014.

I would first like to thank all Externals (yourself, for the positive comments about the overall quality of the subject area's work, the diversity of modules we offer supported by a strong research culture, the high level of student achievement and the variety and rigour of the assessment procedures, the efficiency of the marking, feedback and exams administration. In return I would also like to thank all Externals for their work and support both during the year (approving draft exam papers) and during the day of moderation in Leeds before the Exams Board.

We are delighted to read your praise about the various improvements to our language and translation programmes this year, such as the incorporation of tasks to develop employability skills.

You express some concern in your report regarding the need for greater administrative support during the academic year 2014-2015. Please be sure that we will inform External Examiners in good time as regards the date of the Exams Board and the moderation day prior to this. We hope this way to facilitate your activities as External Examiner. Next year, furthermore, greater attention will be paid to the provision of module handouts, marking criteria and selected assessed pieces of work to our Externals at the aforementioned moderation day to the same end. Access to our Virtual Learning Environment, in order to enable you to monitor the digital submission of work, will be provided well in advance of the time you are required to consult these documents. A specific folder for External Examiners will be generated to this end. The matter of the precise nature of the External Examiner's role was raised at the SMLC Progression Meeting a fortnight after the SPLAS Exam Board. The precise forms of action to be taken in light of your comment in this respect (shared by other External Examiners) are still to be confirmed. We hope those actions taken will avoid similar confusion in the future.

Your comments as regards the importance of flagging formative methods of assessment and the more extensive use of digital submission and marking will be brought to the attention of module coordinators over the summer, ready for their return to Leeds in September and the commencement of classes.

We are grateful for your comments and suggestions as regards the introduction of placement tests at the beginning of the academic year, and we will raise these issues at the relevant institutional forum (the School Taught Student Education Committee, run by _____).

As regards the possibility of implementing a 0-100 mark scale, I am afraid that this is not possible: the 20-90 grade scale was passed by Senate in 2011-2012 and will be the scale we use for the foreseeable future.

Your positive comments about the departmental work and, in particular, the Spanish-language teaching section have already been passed on to colleagues.

Finally, I should like to thank you once again for your work and support over the course of the last year, and look forward to maintaining our successful collaboration with you in 2013-2014.

Best regards,

Lecturer in Spanish History
Exam Officer
University of Leeds
Leeds LS1 4JT